The 1940s saw John Burroughs School, still an upstart at less than twenty years of age, overwhelm the competition in the ABC League, trample public school powerhouses, and race to the very brink of a state basketball championship. In the previous decade, Burroughs had rejoiced in its three ABC League trophies. In the 1940s, by contrast, winning the Harvard Cup at year’s end had become an expectation. The Burroughs name was inscribed there-on no less than seven times—in 1941–43 and 1946–49—meaning that the trophy was twice retired and sent home to the Bombers’ burgeoning trophy case.

The string of loathsome losses in varsity football to Country Day School was reversed, producing a decade of Burroughs dominance, including five victories in a row. The C team, meanwhile, established a dynasty of historic proportions, creating a contagion that spread to the B football and C basketball teams alike. Tennis asserted itself, and track sprinted to a second-place finish in the state meet in mid-decade. Varsity baseball and soccer continued their inexorable march forward, and with a final push at the end of the decade by the 49ers, the Burroughs name reverberated across the state of Missouri.

THE IMPACT OF A WORLD WAR

For the first half of the decade the backdrop to athletics at Burroughs was the Second World War, including its looming threat of the draft for high school seniors. The 1943 yearbook—still called the *Review*—acknowledged the conflict in an introduction to the athletics section titled “Power for Victory”:

> With the war playing such a huge role in our everyday lives, it is more than ever necessary for those who are subject to military duty to be physically fit. The system of physical education at Burroughs is designed to bring this goal about.

Left: School spirit, a Burroughs hallmark
The same theme was sounded in March 1942 by the World as it catalogued programs available for students to support the military effort. One was “the introduction of boxing into the physical education program.” This led to a week-long boxing tournament at the school “divided into junior and senior divisions in order to match the fighters more evenly in weight and ability.”

Roger Altvater ’46 noted that Burroughs boys were subject to the draft at the end of the semester in which they turned eighteen. Accordingly, he and others who were scheduled to come of age early in their senior year attended summer school in 1945 so they could graduate in January. When the war ended in August, they finished school in the normal course.

In September 1945, the Burroughs trustees announced plans to renovate the existing gymnasiums and construct a new one, all for the sum of $100,000. The campaign “To Build a Better Burroughs” was successful, and in November 1947 the Memorial Gymnasium, still in use, was dedicated “to the men and women of John Burroughs School who served their country in World War II and in memory of those who gave their lives.” Those who gave the last full measure of devotion were named on the plaque that remains outside the gym. They were men who had also given fully to athletics in their days at Burroughs.

Much has been written about the football rivalry between the two prestigious, private schools of St. Louis County. The World in 1943 minced no words in declaring the annual season-ending matchup “the most important athletic event of the year.” In the usual publicity rump to the 1942 game, the World reprinted a standby editorial from November 1935:

Harvard and Yale, Army and Navy, Washington University and St. Louis (University), John Burroughs and Country Day—these traditional rivalries are known to all. . . . Burroughs’ competition with Country Day is not as of great duration as the other famous pairs. It is, however, every bit as intense. Ours is a rivalry which we value. We respect Country Day, its students and its teams, and we look for hard-fought games that are also cleanly fought. . . . We do not wish that the spirit of rivalry change to that of a feud.

In 1949 the newspaper offered an explanation for the competitive phenomenon: “The natural rivalry developed out of the fact that the two institutions are the outstanding nonsectarian schools in the St. Louis district.” Ironically, the heat of competition on the field has forged many enduring relationships between the competitors over the years.

Whatever its origin, the rivalry had been decidedly lopsided. From 1936 through 1939, CDS was a perfect 4–0 with a point advantage of 73–0. In the 1930s, Country Day continued the rout with a record of 7–1–2, outscoring the Bombers 140–57. Burroughs won in 1931 and tied in 1937 and 1939. The World periodically reminded its readers, however, that the 1936 game should have been a second Burroughs win for the decade: Earl Sherry Jr. ’37 returned a punt the length of the field in the last minute for an apparent 19–18 victory, but the play was nullified by a clipping call, “although the offender remains anonymous to this day.”

In the 1940s, Burroughs turned the tables with a vengeance, losing in 1940, 1941, 1943, and 1944 but otherwise dominating the series with six victories—five of them in sequence from 1945 to 1949—and outscoring the Rams 142–65. Tack on Burroughs wins in 1950 and 1951 and the winning streak extended to seven years. This meant that graduating seniors in 1951 and 1952 never witnessed a varsity football loss to Country Day. Furthermore, because the B and C teams had success in the same period, Shelby Pruett ’50, captain of the 1949 team, could state with accuracy: “I never played on a football team that lost to Country Day.”
THE FAMOUS (INFAMOUS) BAT PLAY

It was the fall of 1941 and Robert Hughes, head football coach at Country Day from 1926 to 1965 and one of the founders of the ABC League, had a problem. Burroughs won a 7-6 game, and five of his players were down with injuries. "Pop" needed a boost, so he turned to a bat that would go down in infamy—at least at Burroughs.

The Country Day News in November 1970 recounted an interview with Hughes that touched on the origin and substance of the "bat play." Hughes designed it in conjunction with coaches from Cleveland and Webster Groves high schools. Gene Tittman, wearing a glove, batted the ball up the field and out of bounds. "According to a rule then in effect, any ball knocked over the sideline in such a manner would be in the possession of the last team that touched it," the News reported.

The World described what unfolded on the field. Burroughs went up early 6-0 on a ten-yard sweep by Dave Scott '42. In the second quarter, Country Day unveiled the bat play for a sixty-yard march deep into Burroughs territory before returning to conventional play for a touchdown and a 7–6 halftime lead. The play "completely baffled the Bombers," reported the World. In the second half Frank "Bud" Schleicher '43 recovered a fumble at the CDS 15 from where Bob Matthews '42 scored on a thirty-yard run. "Bodey" Messinger '43 circled from the right and fired three yards to the left for the second tally of the day, and spirits ran high on the east side of the playing field. The play had been allowed during the game as a backward pass, batted in flight, that was awarded to the team that last touched the ball. The skulduggery was banned the following year by a rule change providing "if a backward pass or fumble is batted forward by the offense, it becomes a forward pass." Country Day was forced to return to the drawing board.

Emotions were high for the season-ending game. Coach George Staten's boys entered with a strong 3–1 record. Enthusiasm escalated when a cavalcade of Burroughs cars, bedecked in blue and gold, proceeded from downtown Clayton out McKnight Road to Woodson Road, and thence to Brown Road, the site of the old Country Day campus near the airport. The World blared the results in great detail: On Burroughs' first offensive series, junior Jimmy Jenkins '44, a sprinter in track, swept to the left on a reverse and "skirted 46 yards behind expert blocking for the first tally of the day, and spirits ran high on the east side of the playing field." The Bombers next scored a "freak touchdown" when left-handed Roderick "Roddy" Messinger '43 circled from the right and fired a ten-yard pass to Rutledge "Rut" Deas '43, closely guarded in the end zone by two defenders. Deas tipped the ball in the air where it was grabbed by Paul "Bud" Beisman '43 for a Burroughs halftime lead of 14–0.

The consensus was that Country Day's innovation had given them the needed edge. Outraged Burroughs fans demanded "football, not volleyball," Hughes recalled. "I was not very popular at Burroughs after that game." The World objected to the play as "a formation—deviated in the light of official interpretation—that gives no defense a chance." Mark Neville of the English Department, a football enthusiast, took half a page in the World for a largely indecipherable analysis of the play in light of the 1941 Interscholastic Football Rules. The play had been allowed during the game as a backward pass, batted in flight, that was awarded to the team that last touched the ball. The play had been allowed during the game as a backward pass, batted in flight, that was awarded to the team that last touched the ball. The play had been allowed during the game as a backward pass, batted in flight, that was awarded to the team that last touched the ball.

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Country Day struck in the third quarter after a sustained drive, “but this was quickly remedied as Jimmy Jenkins ran the CDS kickoff back for 85 yards and proved himself without a doubt the fastest man on the field.” When the Bombers regained possession, they “rolled unmolested from mid-field into striped territory for the final tally of the game,” scored by Lawrence Manchester ’43. Jenkins gained a whopping 185 yards; the bulwarks on the line were Beisman at right end and right tackle Fred Eiseman ’43, son of two of Burroughs founders and later a revered science teacher and football and baseball coach at JBS from 1950 to 1961. Beisman-Eiseman allowed only twenty-five yards around their end on a day when Country Day gained a total of 254 on the ground. Evatt Sante ’43, an outsized lineman for his time at 220 pounds, kicked four extra points, which the World called a story in itself. “Very seldom in high school football is a place kick attempted for the extra point; but those boys had it down to a science.”

Still smarting from the surprise bat play of 1941, the World seized on the victory to chasten Country Day: “For the first time in 11 years, we have a real victory to talk about. . . . Last year made a deep impression on the team of John Burroughs. This year, Codasco was ‘batted’ into ignominious defeat for their meager victory.”

The 1942 season would have been perfect but for a 7–6 loss to Ritenour. Another season highlight was the first win in five years over Western Military Academy, 9–7, despite the absence of three Burroughs starting backs and a regular end. The Beisman-Eiseman duo excelled again, sacking a Western runner for a safety. Bill Kieffer ’45, the starting center, scored on a seventy-yard jaunt with an intercepted pass, aided by key down-field blocks from Beisman and Kip Corneli ’43.

Perhaps it was inevitable. Despite the World’s admonition that the rivalry with Country Day not turn into a feud, emotions of the moment ultimately seized control at the game of 1942, with partisans on both sides finally crossing the line. A sub-headline in the World on Burroughs’ shellacking of the Rams exclaimed, “Goal Posts Torn Down in Fierce Fight Following Game.” Perhaps out of decorum, the story provided no further details.

John Minton ’46 was a freshman at the time at Wydown Junior High School who entered Burroughs in the tenth grade and started on the school’s first undefeated team in 1945. Minton supplied details on the melee in written recollections prepared for this book:

In November 1942, JBS trounced CDS 28–7 at Country Day. I attended that game, and when it was over the JBS fans rushed on the field to tear down the goal posts, and the CDS fans came out in force to defend them. In the middle of this swarming mass of pushing and shoving was a tall blond woman, dressed in high heels, stockings and a full-length mink coat, using her purse for a bolo against the CDS defenders. That woman was Mrs. Jule Miller the mother of Jule Miller ’43, who played in that game, and Marilyn Miller ’45.

Multiple Burroughs players received post-season honors. Named to the All-ABC League first team were Beisman, Sante, and Jenkins, placed on the second team were Evans, halfback Manchester, quarterback Dean, left-end Scott Pollock ’44, and left guard Corneli. Beisman also made the All-District second team.
Varsity basketball captured its first league championship in school history in 1940–41, compiling an 11–1 record in regular-season play and adding two victories in the post-season district tournament. The starting five were Julian Beisman, Edward “Bud” Samuels, Charles Renard, and Robert Zelle, all ’41, and Ted Martin ’42. The backups were Robert Matthews and Charles Ellaby, both ’42.

The Bombers were known for their second-half heroics, as in the second Principia game which they won 38–30 to secure the championship. The game was tied after three quarters, but “the Bombers put on one of the most beautiful displays of basketball ever seen at Burroughs to go ahead and win in the final quarter,” reported the Review. Burroughs reached the quarterfinals of the district tournament by beating Pacific behind “Big Moose” Renard’s ten points, and then beating Brentwood, led by Bob Zelle with fourteen points.

Varsity basketball added a second league crown in 1942–43 with a modest record of 4–2 in league play—but with a 36–14 thrashing of Country Day in the first encounter. Bill Kieffer, merely a sophomore, and Loy Ledbetter ’43 were strong on the inside while Bob Salisbury ’43 was the high scorer. The team plummeted in the next two years, but Kieffer led the league in scoring and earned All-League honors in both campaigns, Jerry Rubenstein ’45, captain in 1944–45, also earned All-Conference recognition.

Basketball returned to prominence in 1946–47 under first-year coach Ray Wolfe, sharing the league title with Western and compiling a regular-season record of 8–3. One or more of John Pfeifler ’47, Bob Maune ’47, and sophomore Dave Sisler ’49 usually scored in double figures. The two seniors made first-team All-ABC, and Sisler, a portent of things to come, was on the second-team. In district play, Cleveland High School routed Burroughs in a David-versus-Goliath matchup. Burroughs as David would slay many a Goliath as it marched through the state tournament in 1949, but that is a separate story.

**BASKETBALL EMERGES**

**FLUX IN THE COACHING RANKS**

George Staten was named head football, basketball, and baseball coach in 1935, opening auspiciously with a 3–1–1 record in football and a three-way tie for the league title. Staten proved himself something of a coaching Houdini with his ability to divide his time. Between 1940 and 1944 he twice coached A and B basketball at the same time, and in 1941–42 he tackled the C team as well. Staten was replaced in 1945 by Lyle Bennett in varsity football and basketball, but he continued as the head coach in baseball, compiling an uncommonly strong record, and at the C level in football and basketball with breathtaking results.

Bennett, formerly a football assistant to the renowned Fritz Crisler at Michigan, led Burroughs to its first undefeated football season in 1948.
season (one tie) in 1945 and a second-place finish in the state track meet in 1946. He was succeeded by Raymond Wolfe, who took Burroughs to unprecedented heights on the gridiron and the hardwood in his seven-year career.

A celebrity joined the coaching staff for a single year in B football—Dick Yore, a three-year starting quarterback for Coach Jimmy Conzelman’s famous Washington University teams of the 1930s, which held their own against Army, Notre Dame, Illinois, Missouri, and SMU. Yore, a member of his university’s Sports Hall of Fame, became a thoracic surgeon and sent two children to Burroughs, Michael ’68 and Lisa ’74. He coached the Bulldogs to a 5–1 record and a league championship. At the football banquet, an appreciative squad presented the budding physician with a blood pressure instrument.

“The Saw Is Sharpened”

On a Saturday morning in January 1944, Deyo “Sam” Leland, Burroughs athletic director from the inception, was sawing wood at his home in Glendale. He came inside to rest, telling his wife he thought the saw was dull. He did not return to his chores. The man who had charted Burroughs’ illustrious athletic course died at the age of fifty-one. In addition to serving Burroughs, Leland had contributed mightily to the Boy Scouts, of his university’s Sports Hall of Fame, became a thoracic surgeon and sent two children to Burroughs, Michael ’68 and Lisa ’74. He coached the Bulldogs to a 5–1 record and a league championship. At the football banquet, an appreciative squad presented the budding physician with a blood pressure instrument.

The saw is sharpened. For as long as John Burroughs School lives, the life of Coach Deyo S. Leland will be a symbol of unstinting devotion to the principles of thinking, being and playing clean.

A memorial drinking fountain was initially planned near the amphitheater, but the final remembrance was something more consonant with Leland’s playing clean. He did not return to his chores. The man who had charted Burroughs’ illustrious athletic course died at the age of fifty-one. In addition to serving Burroughs, Leland had contributed mightily to the Boy Scouts, who had graduated. His first season was mediocre—a 4–4 record—but Wolfe inherited a rebuilding job rivaling the Marshall Plan. The entire first string of the great 1945 team had graduated. His first season was mediocre—a 4–4 record—but something happened the week before the Country Day game that the players would never forget.

Dave Thies ’49, a sophomore like Thies, told the story: “He challenged each player, mano-a-mano. I’ve never seen anything like him in my life. They were going to hit or be hit. A player was a man or a mouse— and all the mice had Ray Wolfe to contend with. When Saturday came, it was a different team. We went over and told them that’s when my athletic career began—right there.”

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In 1946 a determined young man named George Raymond Wolfe began a stunning seven-year career at Burroughs as head coach of football, basketball, and track. So spectacular were his results that some forged his hero he also taught math. He was the first man from Dartmouth College; the second was Jim Lemen (1963–66, 1970–2011).

Wolfe, square-jawed and serious, was a three-year standout running back at Dartmouth, followed by three years in the Navy playing baseball and serving as a pilot and navigator in the Pacific. At the time of Wolfe’s death in 2002, Chuck Thies ’49 described him for the Burroughs Report:

Coach Wolfe was laid-back and usually wore a half smile that made you wonder what he was thinking. There must have been a fair number who admired that demeanor because it seemed that a good many, some perhaps unconsciously, emulated it—maybe still do. It is interesting to speculate how much of Ray Wolfe is still at the schools who performed under his mentorship in the following years.

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Peter Fischer ’53, a key member of the 1953 state basketball champions, recalled another instance of Wolfe’s no-nonsense approach to his job: “During the season, Ray Wolfe called the entire team into the chalk talk room and told us that we should take the message home to our parents that he was the coach and he was not interested in any more gratuitous advice from parents of the team about who should play for how long.”

Wolfe is part of the lads who performed under his mentorship between 1949 and 1953 he went on a state-championship tear:

• 1949: fourth place in the state tournament;
• 1951: twenty-three-game winning streak and third place in state;
• 1952: another run through the regionals into the state tournament with a season record of 29–2;
• 1953: a 27–1 season and Burroughs’ first and only state basketball championship.

In track, Wolfe’s 1950 team placed second in the district and fifth in the state meet, half a point from third. In 1951, competing against some eighty schools, Burroughs rose to fourth in the state, and in 1952 they were crowned state champions.

Wolfe left Burroughs in 1953 for private industry, first with Ralston Purina and later with other companies outside St. Louis. He never returned to coaching, but he maintained contact over the years with many of his Burroughs players.
CHEERLEADING EVOLVES

Women’s suffrage became law in 1920 by the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution. Twenty-nine years later, Burroughs girls gained the right to be cheerleaders by vote of the student body.

There was never a shortage of enthusiasm for the Burroughs teams, but in the early years support was ad hoc and ill-organized. Student body legislation in 1939 established a cheerleading corps—but it was strictly a male domain. Through ballots distributed in advisories, the school elected a squad of three boys: James Alexander and Clement “Bub” Pollock, both ’41, and Donald Charles ’42. They were succeeded in January the following year by Ted Martin ’42, Evatt Sante ’43, and Laurens “Laurie” White ’43—all to receive Burroughs letters for their efforts at the spring athletic banquet. A month later, the student council, realizing that too often the cheerleaders themselves were involved in games, expanded the group to six. The World was fully behind the effort, down to explicit instructions on the art of cheering:

The most effective cheer is the one that is given in perfect unison with the motions of the cheerleader. . . . Start on the FIRST syllable. Keep together and snap it out at the correct time . . . . If you pitch your voice up and force the sound against your teeth, this will save your voice and give a clearer, sharper tone to the yell.

The World closely monitored attendance at games, chastising the student body when needed. “Despite a great deal of prompting from this editorial column,” the World chafed in 1940, “attendance at the football games last Saturday was still far below what it should be. Especially this was true in the morning. It was honestly pitiful to see such a small handful of people attending these games.”

Gender equality came to cheerleading in the fall of 1949 when the student body voted to admit girls, with faculty concurrence. Nominations were taken, and a tryout assembly was convened. A lunchtime election followed, producing the following winners: Ann Scott ’50; Dorcas Taylor and Jere Meisel, ’51; and Leigh Strassner and Ralph “Bebe” Weinrich, ’53. In an editorial “Bring on the Girls,” the World hailed “the fine move on the part of the Legislative Assembly.” It was chagrined by the long delay in admitting girls, but it sounded the right note for the future:

The reason that girls have previously been denied this privilege is not readily apparent, although some parents perhaps consider it unladylike and unsophisticated for their daughter to go through the cheerleader’s acrobatics. We do not go along with this attitude. Instead, we believe that school spirit will increase considerably by this new plan.

C FOOTBALL JUGGERNAUT

Combine the New York Yankees with the Boston Celtics and you might have a dynasty rivaling the C football team of John Burroughs School from 1939 to 1949. The Junior Bombers played a six-game season—two each against their three ABC League foes (with an occasional non-league supplement). Over the eleven years their record was simply staggering: nine league championships—eight outright and one a tie; a record of 49–1–2 in league play, with a point margin of 1,068–85; undefeated in eight of the nine championship seasons (once the cheerleaders themselves were involved in games in only two of those eight years), and unscorned upon four years.

The strepomede began under Coach Sum Laeland, who oversaw three undefeated seasons and an eighteen-game winning streak from 1939 to 1941. The 1942 team extended the streak to twenty games before a loss that caused a tie for the championship. The 1943 season, Leland’s last, was a losing one, but in 1944 the boys returned to form when George Staten transferred down from the varsity. Staten coached the C team for five of the next six seasons with monstrous results: five league championships, three perfect seasons, and a point advantage of 765–39.

The biggest Staten years were 1946 and 1949 when his whiz kids scored at a point-a-minute clip—while allowing no points against them. The Junior Bombers played eight-minute quarters, or 192 minutes in a six-game season. In this compressed time, the 1946 team, captained by Dick Strassner and George “Lew” Petring, both ’49, rang up 259 points for an average of 35 per game. Jim Burst and Alden Caskie, both ’49, were the high scorers while Shelby Pruett ’50 wore out a shoe kicking extra points. Pruett and Strassner did the passing, completing 75 percent of their attempts for eight touchdowns.

Arthur Heuer ’49 played on Staten C teams from eighth grade through tenth. The coach’s playbook was thin, Heuer recalled, but he drilled the boys rigorously. The premier play was 418—a reverse from the 4 back to the 1 back through the 8 hole, led by an avalanche of blockers. “We scored a touchdown every time,” Heuer marveled. When 418 was called, Heuer at center snapped the ball, made a quick block, and promptly trotted to the goal line to prepare for the extra point.

The St. Louis Star-Times featured the 1946 team as the “Little Fellows Who Had a Big Season” and “the colossus of the ABC League.” So potent was their performance that Mark “Doc” Neville of the English department, by then the varsity line coach,
was moved to laud them in verse at their football banquet. Staten, for his part, could not separate himself from his 1946 point-a-minute squad. He followed them up to the B team in 1947 for a brilliant encore—undefeated league champions with a point spread over six games of 126–12. The Review called it “one of the best B teams in the history of John Burroughs School.” Indeed, the B team was energized for the decade as a whole, claiming four league titles outright and tying for a fifth.

Staten’s magic at the C level was not limited to football. After coaching varsity basketball to its first championships, he switched to the C team for the seasons of 1944–45 through 1949–50. In those six years his teams captured five league championships, suffering no defeats in league play in the championship seasons, and going undefeated overall for three years.

Staten left Burroughs in a blaze of glory. His last C football team in 1949, captained by Gerry Papin ’52 and Gordon Philpott ’53, lagged only a few points behind the phenoms of 1946. They recorded a perfect season, averaging thirty-four points per game and shutting out all opponents. Staten’s last C basketball team of 1949–50 followed suit. The squad raced to thirteen wins against no losses, outscoring their opponents 537–231 for an average of 41–17 per game. This was the very group that would bring Burroughs a state basketball crown in 1953.

1945: UNDEFEATED VARSITY FOOTBALL

The Class of 1946 brought Burroughs its first undefeated varsity football team in 1945, compiling a 7–0–1 record and outscoring the opposition 123–32. Roger Altvater ’46 pointed out that the season was made possible through a quirk of fate. In tenth grade, eight boys transferred into Burroughs from Clayton schools and elsewhere, all to become varsity athletes and most to contribute significantly to the team of 1945. They were John Minton, Bill Maritz, Robert Mueller, Jack Goessling, Richard Clarahan, William Thompson, Al Schneider, and Hugh Rosaaen. “We wouldn’t have had that 1945 season without those guys,” Altvater asserted.

For his inaugural season, Coach Lyle Bennett brought with him the Michigan playbook and game films. John Minton ’46, quarterback on the team, retains total recall of the season. “We were a Woody Hayes–style team,” he related. “We threw only three passes all season.” Just as Hayes would have predicted, one fell incomplete, one was intercepted, and the third was a completion—in this case from Bob Mueller to Peyton Daniel ’46 for the touchdown that beat Country Day 6–0.

Because of injuries, the team played only one game at full strength, “but there was always a player to rise to the occasion,” reported the Review. The Bombers beat Kirkwood 7–0 in the sixth game in a major upset. “We had no more business playing those guys than the Chicago Bears,” claimed the quotable Minton. They had just been crowned the county champions, he said, and were photographed as such under the Burroughs goal posts before the game. But Neville, the new line coach, was a Kirkwood resident, and he had been mentally preparing his players for this
game since the first day of preseason practice. Burroughs jammed the Kirkwood offense, and Al Schneider barreled over from the four yard line in the second half for the decisive score. He also ran for the extra point. “I don’t think they got past our fifty yard line all day,” Minton asserted. “I was so pumped up I couldn’t go into the locker room at halftime. I was still looking for someone to knock down at 11 o’clock that night at Medarts.”

The blowout of the season was against Roxana, 46–12, with three touchdowns by Schneider, two by Daniel, and one by Giesecke. The lone blip was a tie with Clayton. Burroughs led 6–0 late in the fourth quarter on a first-half Daniel touchdown when Clayton launched a passing attack. A sixty-five-yard completion put them on Burroughs ten yard line, and with seconds remaining they scored on another pass play to record the tie.

The Burroughs touchdown pass that beat Country Day came in the second quarter, but the Bombers needed a fierce goal-line stand before halftime to secure the victory. The win led to a strange sight two weeks later. Country Day’s Dick Klinger, in fulfillment of a bet with Peyton Daniel, pushed Daniel through the streets of downtown Clayton in a wheelbarrow, with Daniel flourishing a sign touting the game score.

The Codaco game usually ended the season, but this year a “post-season” contest was played against Pembroke Country Day in Kansas City. Players and supporters alike traveled by train in a festive event for an 18–12 Burroughs victory. When the All-ABC team was published it contained three Burroughs names, all backs—Minton, Schneider, and Daniel. Minton was quick to credit the linemen who were overlooked: ends Bill Thompson ’46 and Al Deichmiller ’47, center Jim Kelly ’46, and interior linemen Lynn Krause, Bill Petring, Herb Phillips, Bill Maritz, and Bill Costen, all ’46.

The undefeated season still generates great pride in the Burroughs family. Janey Studt ’46, when asked about the athletic prowess of her class, exclaimed in response, “You mean the famous Class of 1946! We were undefeated in football and won the ABC League, and we were proud of it. We didn’t have cheerleaders then (except those few elected boys), but all of the girls were at every game cheering them on just as enthusiastically.”

Baseball Posts Hefty Scores

A certain monotony settled into ABC League baseball in the 1930s. From 1930 to 1939, Burroughs won eight league titles. The trend continued unabated in the 1940s—seven more titles, only two by tie. The man at the helm was George Staten, head coach from 1936 to 1950 (with a year off in 1947). Staten’s daughter, Sharlee ’49, a fine Burroughs athlete herself, called baseball her father’s “true love.” So it would seem. In fourteen years, he won twelve championships, and the Bombers were undefeated in league games in four of those seasons. His only non-title seasons were 1940 and 1941.

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Burroughs ran up some hefty scores over the years. The 1941 squad was “one of the ‘hitting-out’ teams ever seen in Burroughs uniforms” by the Brown’s account—despite its lack of a title. It “outslugged Normandy for a 14–10 victory” and against Country Day “chalked up 19 hits and left with a 22–9 victory, hitting the ball to all corners of the field.” The 1946 squad, the second in a row to be undefeated in league play, overran Clayton 20–4, hammering seven different pitchers for eighteen hits, four of them by Dick Clarahan ’46.

Excellent pitching in the first half of the decade came from Tommy Lasker ’42, a three-year starter, Chad El- laby ’42, Bill Obear ’43, and Robert “Robin” Day ’45. The league championship of 1943 boosted Burroughs to yet another leg on the Harvard Cup signifying the overall championship of the ABC League. Highlights of that season included a one-hitter by Obear against Clayton and a grand slam by Scott Pollock ’44 against Western. Pollock, a junior in his third year of varsity play, missed his senior year due to the military draft.

In the 1944 and 1945 seasons, Day was a force on the mound, allowing only seven hits in four games against Country Day and Western. Hugh Rosaaen ’46 was an able reliever and the leading hitter in 1945; in 1946 he struck out fifteen Western batters in a 1–0 victory. John Minton and Bob Mueller ’46 stood out in the 1946 season, one in which JBS sealed the league title—together with another leg on the Harvard Cup—when Clarahan hit a home run to beat Country Day. Dave Sidey ’49, only a freshman, struck out eleven in a three-hitter over Western.

Sidey was dominant in 1948, allowing only four hits in three games against Country Day and Western as the Bombers tied for the championship. He was All-League selection along with Shelby Pruett ’50 at third base and Dick Strasser ’49, catcher. The 1943 team, undisputed champions, placed Strasser, Sidey, and Jim Bunt,
second base, on the All-Conference team. It was Sisler's fourth All-ABC award, serving notice of the big-league career that lay ahead. He closed his Burroughs years with a two-hitter over Principia and a three hitter against Western, striking out sixteen in the latter game and clouting a home run, a triple, and two doubles.

In soccer, the Bombers owned the ABC League in the prior decade with six titles. They slowed a bit in the 1940s but still brought home four championship trophies. The first league title was in 1941–42 with “a starless aggregation playing in close cooperation throughout the season,” reported the Review. The team was 3–0–1 in league competition (no games against Principia), with key scoring from Scott Heuer ’42, Dave Scott ’42, and Lou Stockstrom ’43.

The 1944–45 championship team was likewise undefeated in league play at 4–0–2, pummeling their opponents fifteen goals to three. Assisting Head Coach Les Hatchard was Director Leonard Haertter, apparently unable to escape the lure of the athletic field. The Bombers opened with a 2–0 win against the curious-sounding Pelicans of the Muny League. The co-captains were Jack Grant ’45 and Bill Scott ’46, the brother of Dave and the high scorer for the team with seven goals. Other scoring was done by Marc Seldin ’47, four goals, Robin Day ’45 and Peyton Daniel ’46, two each, and Grant, Roger Altvater, and Bill Costen ’46, one each.

The 1946–47 squad took the title with a 5–1 league record with scoring from John Martin and Edgar McCulloch, both ’47, and Tim Cornell, James Forsen, Ray Bolin, and Alan Singeriet, all ’48. The final championship team of 1948–49 posted a 5–3–3 record, its only losses coming in non-conference games to perennial powerhouse CBC and St. Louis U. High. The co-captains were 49ers Lew Petzing and Lou Tiger. Seniors Jim Geissal and Alden Caskie scored key goals, and junior Shelby Pruett took home the Les Hatchard Award for best player in the ABC League, scoring at least thirteen goals by the Review’s account, including six in an 8–0 drubbing of Principia.

Throughout the decade, the weather was a cruel adversary. Against the Pelicans in 1944, the ground was snow-covered and frozen; in a loss the same season at Chamimade the temperature was near zero, and at Country Day the Bombers played to a 1–1 tie “on a field bogged down by six inches of pure slush.” In the winter of 1940, “bad weather caused frequent changes on the schedule and the actual stretch of playing time was little longer than two weeks.” Before a Principia game in the 1948–49 season, coaches Hatchard and Gaylord Montgomery, a long-serving math teacher, “worked for hours chopping ice away from both goals and covering the ground with sand.”

TENNIS, TRACK, AND GOLF

Tennis: disrupting CBC’s dominance
From the beginning of ABC League tennis play in 1931, Country Day won the championship every year until Burroughs interceded with three consecutive titles in 1943–45. The premier player early in the decade was Ira “Bud” Sandperl ’41, described by the Review as “a clever lefthander, excellent at placing shots.” Instructed by the renowned Bill Tilden, Sandperl was a three-year varsity player who rose to the rank of sixth in the St. Louis district.

Burroughs girls gained tennis rankings as well. In 1943, Bettie Scott ’45 reached fourteenth nationally among juniors; she was also first in the district at the “girls” level and second in juniors. Others ranked in the St. Louis district in singles or doubles were Mary Richards ’43, Mary Love and Pat Aloe, both ’44, and Mary Phelan ’45. The first boys championship team of 1943—led by Rut Deas and Larry Post, both ’43, and Bob Spitzer ’44—broke Country Day’s stranglehold on league competition by going 4–0 against Western and Principia and splitting matches with Codasco. The championship team of 1944 was led by Bob Spitzer, “the outstanding player on the team,” according to the Review. Close behind Ben Bishop ’49 serves an ace.
were the cousins Bernard “Bunny” Edison and Bill Edison, both ’45. The team was coached by Elmer Hirth, although he would not join the Burroughs faculty as a math teacher until 1948. The Bombers won their third consecutive tennis title in 1945, again under Hirth, with an undefeated record in league play. The singles positions were held by John Martin ’47 and Bill and Bunny Edison.

The Ben Bishop Era

Burroughs tennis in the second half of the decade was synonymous with Ben Bishop ’49. As profiled in the World, he won five varsity letters beginning in eighth grade and never lost a singles match for the Bombers. Bishop began tennis at the age of eight and was invited to play on the ABC League and regional circuits by thirteenth. By tenth grade he was playing second singles behind John Martin, moving to first the next year after Martin graduated. His strengths, he told the World, were his serve, volley, and net game.

Bishop compiled a stunning record outside the ABC League. His senior year he was ranked first in junior boys singles by the Missouri Valley Tennis Association and first in doubles with his partner, Mike Weatherly of Country Day. A month after playing a leading role in the Bombers’ 1949 race to fourth place in the state basketball tournament, Bishop was runner-up in national junior singles play—held that year at the St. Louis Armory—and he teamed up with Tony Trabert to win the men’s doubles later in the year in Missouri Valley competition. In 2007, Bishop joined other Burroughs tennis luminaries in the St. Louis Tennis Hall of Fame.

Track: The Brothers Scott

One of the prominent track names in the decade was Scott—the brothers Dave ’42 in the dashes and hurdles and Bill ’46, middle distance. Dave Scott capped his three-year career in 1942 by scoring twenty or more points per meet. In the ABC meet that year he won the 220 in 23.5 seconds, the low hurdles in 23.7, and the high hurdles in 15.8.

Bill Scott continued the family tradition in 1944–46 with a record-setting career in the 880 and the mile. He dominated the ABC meet sophomore through senior years. In 1945, he set the record for the league meet in the mile with a time of 4:46.5. That same season, his junior year, he led Burroughs to second place at the meet in Columbia, winning the mile by 20 yards in 4:48.2, and the 880 in a thriller in 2:09.10.

“The half-mile caused the Burroughs spectators to become worried,” the World reported. “Scott was passed the first time around the track. Coming down the last stretch in the two-lap race he was in fifth place, but in true Scott style Bill won by five yards.” Scott tied for first in the 440, according to the World, and Ed McCulloch ’47 placed third. Other points came from the medley relay team, first place; Jack Goessling ’46, second in the 220, and Leonard Parlow ’48, who placed in the broad jump.

Other track standouts included Malcolm “Mac” O’bourn ’40, who excelled as a sprinter, hurdler, and broad jumper, scoring 23½ points himself in a meet with Western, and Carl Messinger Jr. ’41, a burly standout in football and soccer who was built for the shot put yet lithe enough for the mile and half mile. In the class B district meet in 1941, Messinger took first in the mile, second in the 880, and third in the shot, while Walton Chubb ’41 set a meet record in the 440 with a blistering 52.9.

Golf: Gaining in Popularity

Golf debuted in 1949 under the tutelage of Stephen Hinrichs, a recent addition to the history department. There was no interscholastic play initially—only the honing of skills—but the Review promised that the activity was “gaining in popularity as a spring sport, and soon our boys will be competing with the best in the district.”

The Fabulous 49ers

San Francisco has its 49ers, but all they play is football. The 49ers of Burroughs excelled in all sports, spreading the name of their school far and wide. To recognize the sporting achievements of the Class of 1949, the Fathers’ Council presented Burroughs with a plaque bearing the names of all team members in football, basketball, soccer, and baseball. The seniors, with support from underclassmen, had won league championships—and more—in each sport.

“The fabulous 49ers”
Football: “Coming of Age”

In 1948, the 49ers recorded the first undefeated and untied season, ringing up 254 points in eight games against 33 for their opponents—a point differential of 221. Not a single ABC team crossed the Bombers’ goal line. The co-captains were Chuck Thies and Dave Sisler, both ’48.

The Bombers opened the season by crushing Chaminade 59–0, with scoring by an array of players. In a splendid display of sportsmanship, Coach Ray Wolfe instructed his men to punt on first down as the score escalated. Their next game was a squeaker, 15–13, against Pembroke County Day; the Bombers’ points came on a safety, a short-yardage plunge by Thies, and a pass from Ben Bishop to Ken Read ’49. Pembroke’s hard-charging group was stymied by excellent line play from Burroughs, the Review reported, especially by John Krause ’50, Tom Perkins ’49, and Lew Tiger ’49.

The team overran league opponents Principia 33–0 and Western, in a sea of mud, 12–0. Key fumble recoveries by Ed Rowland ’50 and Doug Montgomery ’49 highlighted the win over Western. Burroughs continued its high-scoring ways by drubbing Coyle, a Catholic school in Kirkwood, 49–0. Versatile Shelby Pruett scored two touchdowns, two extra points, and a field goal. Wolfe again displayed sportsmanship by playing substitutes over half the game.

Dave Sisler, an insightful sports historian, pinpointed the sixth game of the season as a watershed for John Burroughs School. Kirkwood came to Leland Field ranked as one of the city’s top teams, just as in 1945, and featuring two heralded players, Carroll Maas and Davey Jones. As a multitude of Kirkwood boys in red and white streamed down the hillside, led by their cheerleading corps, the Burroughs squad, thirty strong, watched and wondered. Ultimately undaunted, the Bombers stymied the Kirkwood offense and raced to a 19–0 halftime lead behind scoring from Thies and Pruett. Maas and Jones scored for the Pioneers in the fourth quarter, but Burroughs cruised to victory 19–14. The Review hailed it as “the greatest victory of the season.” Sisler took a broader view: “Burroughs came of age when we beat Kirkwood,” he declared. “Before that, no one really cared about us—we were the ABC League. Suddenly people realized—Burroughs can compete.”

Burroughs athletes with famous fathers. Dave Sisler ’49, left, and Shelby Pruett ’50, seen in their football uniforms in 1948 with their fathers and former Major League Baseball greats “Hub” Pruett, right, and George Sisler, left center.
Speedy Jim Burst, brandishing a cast on his left arm from an injury that had kept him out all season, exploded in the next game against Crystal City, scoring four touchdowns in a 44–6 rout. Crystal City was deep in the country; Burroughs was from the big city, and the boys were private schoolers to boot. Shelby Pruett recalls graffiti in the visitors’ locker room referring to Burroughs as “city slickers” and “pantywaists” and announcing, “We’re gonna’ kick your a____.” Instead, Burroughs raced to a halftime lead of 26–6. When the rout was over, Pruett recalled, “we were told we’d better pack our things and leave in a hurry.”

The season ended with the fourth straight shutout of Country Day. The victory margin of 23–0 was the widest of any Burroughs win in history. The Bombers’ first strike came on a twenty-nine-yard Pruett-to-Sisler pass. After Rowland blocked a punt, Pruett scored for a 13–0 halftime lead. Burst scored from twenty-three yards in the second half, and Pruett kicked a field goal. The game ended with Burroughs on Country Day’s one-foot line. Honors poured in for the Bombers: Named All-ABC were Pruett and Thies in the backfield, Sisler at end, and Perkins in the line. Sisler and Thies made second-team All-District and Pruett and Burst honorable mention.

A Basketball Encore
The 49ers provided an immediate encore with a dramatic race to a fourth-place finish in the state basketball tournament, a particularly noteworthy achievement in that the 1948–49 season was the last in which all schools competed in the same playoff category, regardless of size.

The starting five were all 49ers—Dave Sisler, Ben Bishop, Jim Burst, Chuck Thies, and Dick Strassner. As part of their ABC championship, Burroughs beat Principia when they were the only undefeated team in St. Louis. The Bombers flattened Webster Groves 44–29, which, by the Review’s account, “began to indicate that they were going places.” Emotions ran high as the team gathered momentum. Two JBS fathers were ejected from one game for hurling jibes at the referees, which may have prompted an editorial in the World by John Zentay ’49 reminding boosters that enthusiasm was fine, “but when it reaches such proportions that the referees are personally insulted then the fans are stepping out of bounds.”

By the time of the subregionals of the state tournament at University City High School, Burroughs was 11–2 and seeded ninth out of sixteen behind such powerhouses as St. Louis U. High, Cleveland, Beaumont, and Southwest. The Bombers plowed through Hadley 60–24, with reserves playing most of the game, and Soldan Blewitt 53–33. In the semifinals against Southwest, the fast-breaking sharp shooters played their best game of the year, amassing a 56–14 lead before the reserves took over. In the finals, Burroughs overcame University City and their star Terry Fails, 36–31. Strassner had a hot shooting hand, and Jim Burst exhibited dribbling skills in a two-minute stall to close the game.

The regional tournament was held at the Washington University Field House. Burroughs was now seeded second behind McBride. The Bombers overcame CBC in the opener and dominated Lutheran High School in the second round behind Sisler’s twenty-one points. Their opponent in the finals was again U. City, which had advanced to the regional tournament as the runner up in the subregionals. Different
game, same result. Burroughs by 37–29. There were tense moments as the Bombers trailed by six to start the fourth quarter but scored fourteen straight points to win.

By now the little-school-that-could, Burroughs rode the train and an 18–2 record to Springfield, Missouri, for the sixteen-team state championship. There they would mingle with schools that had won thirty games and more. Burroughs snapped Republic’s nineteen-game streak in the first round 55–44 behind Ben Bishop’s twenty-three points. Next came Bowling Green and the win 59–50; Butch Stoner scored fifteen to thirteen but failed to hit accurately from the charity stripe,” reported the St. Louis Star-Times.

An apparent buzzer-beater by sixth-man Rod Wagner ’50 was disallowed as too late. Burroughs partisans seriously questioned the refereeing. According to one second-hand report, the officials believed they had lost control of the Bowling Green game due to the Burroughs fast break, so they wanted to slow the Bombers down in the Buffalo matchup. Disheartened, Burroughs lost the consolation game by precisely the same score to Bonne Terre on a free throw in the last minute.

Sisler made first-team All-State and All-District and was named the prep player of the year, leading the team to sweeping eighteen points per game. Bishop made second-team All-State while Bunt and Thies received All-League recognition.

A strong ABC adversary of the 49ers later became a valued friend of Burroughs. F. Morgan “Buzz” Taylor, a three-sport athlete at Western Military Academy, became the roommate of Dave Sisler, Chuck Thies and Lew Petring, all ’49, at Princeton, where he played football and nearly made the 1952 Olympic team in the long jump. Taylor married Barbara Olin ’50. In 2006, "I set a record in the high jump. But then my sister (Sharlee Staten ’49) came along and broke it—even though she was shorter.”

Sharlee Staten was one of a host of talented girls in the Class of 1943. Ben Bishop wrote of his female classmates “I had Jane Hill, Margie Pruett, Sharlee Staten and Christy Gordon were allowed to compete in boys’ sports, our jobs would have been in real jeopardy.” In their junior year, the girls of ’49 placed seven of their number on the hockey varsity, and their senior-year record of 3–1 was the best of the decade, with scoring by Staten, Hill, Elizabeth Kotsrean, Marion Streett, and Barbara O’Neil.

Major accolades came early in the decade for a Burroughs alumna, Margaret Cornwell ’33. After a superior hockey career at Sweetbriar, she toured Central and South America as part of a U.S. national team. She played for a Midwest collegiate team, along with two other Burroughs alumnae, Alice Rickey ’35 and Elizabeth Leckett ’34, and in 1941 and 1942 she was named to the All-American team of the United States Field Hockey Tournament and Convention. At the time, she was assisting Athletic Director Alice Beaman. “Miss Beaman was instrumental in encouraging all the girls to be athletic,” recalled Virginia Staten ’46, one of George Staten’s daughters. “It was the thing to do.” Janey Studt ’46 concurred. “I played everything.” she related. “It will always be a big part of my life.”

INDIVIDUAL ACCOLADES

The tradition of honoring a girl and boy for their athletic careers at Burroughs continued in the 1940s, a much-anticipated event. By the 1940s, the honor was called the "most valuable player" award. Beginning in 1941 and proceeding chronologically, the recipients were Margery Dodson ’41, Elizabeth “Ibby” Gray ’46, Joy Gilk ’47, Carolyn “Callie” Costen ’48, and Mary Christy Gordon ’49.

The award was important in part because the limited interscholastic play for the girls meant scant opportunities for public recognition. Varsity hockey played only a few games a year—mostly against Principia—and the win-loss record of the 1940s fell off sharply from the prior decade. In addition, varsity programs in other sports—basketball and tennis—developed late. Girls sports, nonetheless, remained an integral part of school life, due in part to the leadership of Athletic Director Alice Beaman. “Miss Beaman was instrumental in encouraging all the girls to be athletic,” recalled Virginia Staten ’46, one of George Staten’s daughters. “It was the thing to do.” Janey Studt ’46 concurred. “I played everything.” she related. “It will always be a big part of my life.”

Field Day was a prime opportunity for the girls to display their talent. “I achieved a goal I had always wanted,” said Barbara. “I set a record in the high jump. But then my sister (Sharlee Staten ’49) came along and broke it—even though she was shorter.”

For the boys, the individual achievement award was dubbed “most valuable players.” In 1941, it was shared by Bob Zelle and Carl Messinger. The Scott brothers, Dave and Bill, won it in 1942 and 1946 respectively. Other winners were John Martin ’43, Ted Royston ’44, Rowland Dodson ’45, Robert Maune ’47, and Sam Grant ’48. With the abundance of talent in the Class of 1949, the judges threw up their hands and spread the wealth.

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